

'The World Turned Upside Down'

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's latest negotiating foray makes you think of "The World Turned Upside Down" — which was the tune the British military band reportedly played when Lord Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown.

The tune's title, rather than the occasion it once enlivened, is what brings it to mind now. Here is an American Secretary of State of Jewish descent. On both counts, he was formerly regarded with deep suspicion by Arab leaders of every political stripe. But if the last Kissinger visit is a good precedent, he can now expect to be greeted in Cairo by street crowds intoning, "Father Kissinger, Father Kissinger!"

In truth, the surrounding ironies are rich and all but limitless. For example, there is the matter of the new journey's origin. It derives from the long and fruitful recent talks between Secretary Kissinger and the Saudi Arabian and Egyptian foreign ministers, Omar Saqqaf and Ismail Fahmy.

On their way to Washington, the two Arab foreign ministers broke their journey in Paris. One of them paid a brief visit to French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert — to explain that business in Washington would prevent him from keeping a prior engagement with President Pompidou. The other did not visit Jobert at all.

It is not surprising, then, that the two Arabs received none of the usual airport courtesies on their departure from the French capital. Yet the French have been vociferously urging the other Europeans to negotiate with the Arab nations without help or interference from this country.

Again, Secretary Kissinger's new trip was not undertaken on his own initiative. He was rather pressingly asked to come aboard again, to help untangle the Mideastern vipers nest a bit further; and the people who pressed him were Foreign Ministers Saqqaf and Fahmy.

Yet again, one sequel of the trip will all but surely be the end of the Arab oil embargo. But during the Washington talks, Secretary Kissinger shrewdly and firmly refused to discuss the problem of oil embargo in the context of the primary aim of his present journey. The timing will probably produce the appearance of a link, but what is to be done about the embargo was in fact separately decided.

As to this journey's primary aim, there are no ironies here. The aim is to secure another long step forward on the road to peace (or at least peace of a sort), by arranging an adjusted cease-fire between the Syrians and the Israelis.

At present, Israeli troops are still within 24 miles of Damascus, and the Syrians are still holding the Israeli prisoners they took in the first days of the Yom Kippur war. The prisoner matter will be the first order of business; and it will not be easy. The difficulty is that the Syrians — or the Syrians' Iraqi and Moroccan allies, according to Damascus — in fact exterminated a larger number of captured Israelis.

The story is not quite so grisly as the first reports, however. Probably a good many more than a third of the 150-plus original Israeli prisoners are still in Syrian hands, waiting to be sent home. Reportedly, Secretary Kis-

singer has already had word from Damascus that the prisoner problem will be promptly resolved at least as far as it can be resolved, in order to get on to larger matters.

The larger matters are the problems of the adjusted cease-fire. The American view is that the pattern of adjusted cease-fire on the Egyptian front should be almost exactly reproduced. This would mean, first, an Israeli withdrawal to a point slightly to the rear of the 1967 cease-fire lines, or just behind the ruined and empty Syrian town of Kuneitra. Second, this would mean the demilitarization of a large area between the new Israeli forward positions and the forward Syrian positions. The Israelis, of course, would be left on the crucial Golan Heights.

No doubt Syrian President Hafez Assad will ask for a better deal. Certainly Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir for a long time resisted any such deal. But it appears that Mrs. Meir is nearly resigned to it now, and that Hafez Assad will also end by accepting it. The main risks, therefore, are those that always arise from any brokerage-transactions between Syrians and Israelis. All the same, it is a fair bet that Secretary Kissinger will bring off his deal in the end.

Finally — one last irony — the Soviets, through Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, have grumbled they ought to be cut in on the action, while the Arabs have said they prefer to deal with Secretary Kissinger alone. All the same, the Soviets will get the reopening of the Suez Canal, so they will be rewarded, too.